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SECRET - LIMDIS

Tuesday, September 20, 1966

TEXT OF CABLE FROM AMBASSADOR BOWLES (New Delhi, 4243)

On September 19 at his request, I called on C. S. Jha at the Foreign Office. Jha explained that Mea had received a cable from Hanoi late last week which quoted from an aide memoire that had just been given to Indian Consul General by the Government of Vietnam Foreign Office. Although the aide memoire itself had not yet been received, Jha felt that I should know about it without further delay.

According to cabled analysis, the aide memoire made the following points:

A. The U. S. appears to be laying basis for a further escalation of the war. Government of North Vietnam anticipates an armed invasion of the Demilitarized Zone, U. S. troop landings in North Vietnam itself and blockade by mines or other measures of Haiphong Harbor. U. S. peace proposals are simply designed to obscure its war plans. (Note: Consul General stated parenthetically that, although Government of North Vietnam analysis is grossly distorted, he is convinced that North Vietnamese leaders genuinely accept this analysis.)

B. North Vietnam stated in the aide memoire that it is prepared to accept any "reasonable proposal" for policing the Demilitarized Zone. (Note: Jha pointed out that the Government of India had made several proposals to which there had not yet been any reaction.)

C. In reference to President Johnson's statement that U. S. is prepared to withdraw its troops on a phased basis North Vietnam is ready to embark on any discussion which may be "fruitful". The Hanoi official who presented aide memoire to Indian Consul General remarked that his government had been in touch from time-to-time with the U. S. Government.

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E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.5
State Dept. Guidelines
By jw, NARA, Date 8-21-00

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The Consul General felt that the aide memoire was important:

A. Because this was the first formal aide memoire which he had ever received from North Vietnam, and

B. Because he was asked to come to the Foreign Office on very short notice and in an atmosphere of high importance.

C. Because its language, although sharply critical of the U.S., was less bitter than usual.

D. Because it referred in a rather affirmative way to the President's statement on withdrawal.

The Consul General stated that China's position in Hanoi has deteriorated sharply in the last few weeks because of the struggles going on inside China and that the Soviets relieved for a moment from Chinese pressure, may be willing to take a more affirmative position.

The Consul General stated that he felt that, while he could not judge what is going on in the minds of the Hanoi leadership, he sensed that they may be beginning to look for a way out. He suggested the following starting point for a fresh attempt.

A. A statement by President Johnson that the U.S. is prepared to remove its troops within three years after establishment of peace.

B. The U.S. Government should stop its bombing without insisting that North Vietnam be labelled aggressors or in the initial stage that their ground forces should be publicly pulled out. If a favorable setting can be created, he believes that Hanoi may be prepared to remove its troops and that indeed a confidential agreement might be reached on this point.

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6. I suggested that it would be unrealistic to expect us to stop bombing until it was clear that North Vietnam forces whose entry into South Vietnam led to the bombing were being withdrawn. I stressed that we are not looking for headline victories over Ho Chi Minh nor do we desire to humiliate North Vietnam. However the fact remains that bombing has effectively hampered flow of North Vietnamese supplies to its troops south of the 17th parallel and it is unreasonable to expect us to forego this exercise until we have something concrete to go on.

7. In response to my question Jha stated that he could not personally judge how much importance should be attached to this aide memoire; when the full text arrives it may be a little clearer. However he saw in it some indication that North Vietnam is more serious about a settlement than it was a few months ago and that time may be ripe for a fresh U. S. initiative.

8. Jha suggested that President might state that he is prepared to remove U. S. troops on a specifically announced phased basis as soon as it is clear that (A) a peace settlement had been reached, and (b) North Vietnam has demonstrated that this time it intends to keep the peace.

9. Jha emphasized that the Hanoi Government is extremely sensitive and consequently that it is important that as far as possible we use words that they can accept. While he realized the difficulties of negotiating under these circumstances he felt the manner in which we approach negotiations and language which we used in discussing the various issues is at least as important as substance of our position.

Comment: I would emphasize again that C. S. Jha did not have the actual text of the Aide Memoire and himself stressed caution in interpreting the report from Hanoi until a full and accurate text is received.

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